

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 05025 01 OF 02 291503Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SAA-01 SES-02 HA-05
SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 SP-02 SS-15 L-03
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9450
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 5025

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: MILI, PINS, PINR, LE, SY
SUBJECT: REMARKS OF PRO-SYRIAN BAATH HEAD ON FIGHTING IN LEBANON
AND REPORTED TRANSFER OF AMBASSADOR PARKER

1. SUMMARY. PRO-SYRIAN BAATH HEAD ASSIM QANSUH TOLD EMBOFF THE FOLLOWING AUGUST 28: THE RECENT FIGHTING IN NORTH LEBANON RESULTED FROM A SYRIAN OPERATION TO OPEN THE CEDARS ROAD, WHICH LINKS TRIPOLI WITH THE BIQA. THE OPERATION WAS MILITARILY SUCCESSFUL, BUT NOT VERY INTELLIGENT, SINCE IT HAD PANICKED THE CHRISTIANS. THE SYRIANS WERE ALSO THINKING OF MOVING ON THE PHALANGE STRONGHOLD IN BYBLOS DISTRICT. SIX CHRISTIANS HAD BEEN KIDNAPPED IN WEST BEIRUT DURING THE LAST TWO DAYS. AMBASSADOR PARKER'S REPORTED TRANSFER WAS UNFORTUNATE, SINCE THE PEOPLE WERE INTERPRETING IT AS A SIGN OF BUCKLING-UNDER TO PRESSURE BY CAMILLE CHAMOUN. END SUMMARY.

2. PRO-SYRIAN BAATH HEAD ASSIM QANSUH, WHO HAD RECENTLY RETURNED FROM A FOUR-DAY VISIT TO THE UPPER BIQA, TOLD EMBOFF THE

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 05025 01 OF 02 291503Z

FOLLOWING AUGUST 29.

3. NORTH LEBANON.

A. THE RECENT FIGHTING IN NORTH LEBANON WAS NOT JUST A SIMPLE SYRIAN REACTION TO CHRISTIAN AMBUSH OF SYRIAN SOLDIERS IN BATROUN AREA ON AUGUST 25. SEQUENCE OF EVENTS WAS AS FOLLOWS:

-- ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO CHRISTIAN MILITIAMEN AMBUSHED AND KILLED THREE SYRIAN SOLDIERS NEAR AYN ATA ON THE CEDARS ROAD BETWEEN DAYR AL AHMAR AND BSHARRI.

-- ABOUT ONE WEEK AGO LT. COL. ALI DIB, COMMANDER OF THE SYRIAN FORCES IN NORTHERN LEBANON, DECIDED TO OPEN THE CEDARS ROAD, THE EASIEST WAY TO GET TO TRIPOLI FROM THE BAALBEK AREA. THEY HAD ALSO DECIDED TO OCCUPY AYN ATA, A MAJOR ARMS STRONGE POINT FOR THE CHRISTIANS, AND TO CONFISCATE WEAPONS HIDDEN BY THE REMAINING PHALANGISTS IN BSHARRI.

-- ON AUGUST 24, THE SYRIANS HAD BEGUN CLEARING OPERATIONS IN THE BATRUN/KURA AREA TO PROTECT THEIR FLANK IN PREPARATION FOR THE ROAD CLEARING OPERATION.

-- FROM AUGUST 25-28 THE SYRIANS HAD CONDUCTED OPERATIONS FURTHER NORTH WHICH RESULTED IN OPENING OF THE CEDARS ROAD. DURING THIS TIME, SYRIANS HAD ALSO OCCUPIED SYN ATA AND SURROUNDED BSHARRI. SYRIANS HAD CONFISCATED WEAPONS IN BOTH CITIES.

B. QANSUH SAID THE OPERATIONS HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN THAT THE SYRIANS HAD PRETTY WELL CLEARED THE CEDARS AND BATRUN AREAS OF CHRISTIAN MILITIAMEN. (WE THINK QANSUH MAY BE UNDULY OPTIMISTIC ON THIS SCORE.) HE BELIEVED CASUALTIES HAD BEEN RELATIVELY LIGHT ON BOTH SIDES.

4. CONSEQUENCES OF THE OPERATIONS.

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 05025 01 OF 02 291503Z

A. QANSUH SAID THE SYRIANS WERE CONSIDERING WHETHER TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SUCCESS IN BATRUN AND CEDARS TO TRY TO MOVE ON ANOTHER CHRISTIAN STRONGHOLD - BYBLOS DISTRICT. QANSUH CLAIMED THAT IT WOULD BE TWO OR THREE DAYS BEFORE IT WAS KNOWN WHETHER "PRESIDENT SARKIS" HAD DECIDED ON SUCH AN OPERATION.

B. QANSUH IMPLIED THAT THE BATRUN AND CEDARS ROAD OPERATIONS, PARTICULARLY IF FOLLOWED BY A SYRIAN MOVE ON BYBLOS, WOULD PROVE TO BE UNWISE. THE OPERATIONS HAD PANICKED THE CHRISTIANS WHO FELT THEY WERE BEING CUT OFF FROM THEIR MOUNTAIN HEARTLAND. THE CHRISTIANS MIGHT RESPOND BY LAUNCHING A GENERAL OFFENSIVE THROUGHOUT LEBANON (PRESUMABLY AIMED AT PROVOKING ISRAELI INTERVENTION). PART OF THIS GENERAL OFFENSIVE WOULD INCLUDE SHELLING OF WEST BEIRUT TO DRAG MUSLIMS AND PALESTINIANS INTO THE FIGHT. QANSUH SAID THAT THE CHRISTIANS MIGHT LAUNCH SUCH AN OFFENSIVE WITHIN A DAY OR TWO.

C. QANSUH SAID THAT THE FORCES INVOLVED IN THE CEDARS AREA WERE NOT THE REGULAR SYRIAN ARMY BUT PART OF RIFAT AL-ASSAD'S DEFENSE COMPANIES. THE CEDARS OPERATION HAD BEEN LAUNCHED IN LARGE PART OUT OF RIFAT AL-ASSAD'S FRIENDSHIP FOR TONY FRANJIYAH RATHER THAN FOR STRATEGIC REASONS. HE SAID ALI DIB WAS VERY INTELLIGENT BUT "MENTALLY UNBALANCED". ALI COULD NOT, FOR EXAMPLE, SIT STILL FOR

FIVE MINUTES AND HOLD A NORMAL CONVERSATION.

D. QANSUH ALSO CONFIRMED AGAIN THAT RIFAT AL ASSAD'S DEFENSE COMPANIES WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR MASSACRE OF ABOUT THIRTY GREEK CATHOLICS IN THE NORTHERN BIQA TOWN OF AL QA ON JUNE 27.

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 5025

5. BEIRUT

A. THE FIGHTING IN AYN AR-RUMMANEH THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 28 HAD STARTED WHEN CHRISTIAN SNIPERS HAD OPENED UP ON MUSLIM CIVILIANS IN SHIYAH, WOUNDING EIGHT PEOPLE.

B. THE SYRIANS HAD NEVER AGREED TO ABANDON THE RIZK TOWER AS PART OF THE AUGUST 9 DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT. ADF COMMANDER SAMI KHATIB HAD TAKEN THE CHRISTIAN PROPOSAL FOR SUCH A WITHDRAWAL TO DAMASCUS. THE SYRIANS HAD REPLIED THAT THEY WOULD AGREE TO SUCH WITHDRAWAL BUT ONLY UNDER THE CONDITION THAT A GUARANTEE COULD BE MADE THAT PHALANGISTS WOULD NOT OCCUPY THE TOWER AFTER THE SYRIAN ARMY WITHDREW. NOBODY WAS WILLING TO MAKE SUCH A GUARANTEE.

C. THERE HAD BEEN A DISTURBING DEVELOPMENT IN WEST BEIRUT WITHIN THE LAST TWO DAYS. SIX CHRISTIANS HAD BEEN KIDNAPPED. THE BAATH PARTY WAS DOING ALL IN ITS POWER TO PREVENT FURTHER KIDNAPPINGS.

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 05025 02 OF 02 291510Z

6. REPORTS OF AMBASSADOR PARKER'S TRANSFER.

A. QANSUH NOTED THAT THE PRESS HAD REPORTED THAT AMBASSADOR PARKER WAS BEING TRANSFERRED. (EMBOFF SAID HE COULD NOT COMMENT ON THIS.)

B. QANSUH NEVERTHELESS WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE AMBASSADOR'S TRANSFER WAS COMING AT A VERY BAD TIME. AMBASSADOR PARKER KNEW LEBANON WELL. PEOPLE WERE INTERPRETING HIS REPORTED DEPARTURE AS A SIGN THAT CAMILLE CHAMOUN HAD SUCCEEDED IN BRINGING PRESSURE TO BEAR TO GET AMBASSADOR PARKER TRANSFERRED, BECAUSE CHAMOUN DID NOT APPROVE OF USG POLICIES.

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Message Attributes

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Draft Date: 29 aug 1978
Decapton Date: 01 jan 1960
Decapton Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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